

11-29-07 - Sentencing is Tuesday: Diocese: Fay still a priest, still getting paid
By Susan Shultz, Darien Times (CT) Reporter

“It’s not enough to live on.”

That’s how diocesan spokesman Joseph McAleer describes the allowance the Rev. Michael Jude Fay still receives from the Diocese of Bridgeport.

McAleer confirmed that Fay, who will be sentenced Tuesday for stealing millions from his parishioners to fund a lavish lifestyle, still draws a modest salary.

And while it’s “not enough to live on,” that depends on one’s definition of living.

In Fay’s case, for years, living included four star restaurants, world travel, first class shopping, and limousines.

He also remains a priest, although McAleer told The Darien Times on Wednesday that he is unauthorized to perform the duties of a priest. Fay’s status within the diocese has remained unchanged since he resigned as pastor from St. John Parish in May of 2006.

This week, the U.S. Attorney’s office recommended that Fay, who pleaded guilty to stealing up to \$1 million from St. John Roman Catholic Parish, should serve a sentence of approximately four to five years in prison. Sentencing will take place in New Haven federal court on Tuesday, Dec. 4, at 3:30.

McAleer said church law throughout the world requires priests to continue to receive a living allowance as long as they remain a priest. The law exists so that priests do not become destitute and a burden to society. He said Fay’s status continues to be under review by the diocese, and the allowance is not near a full salary.

Last month, a federal judge denied a request by Fay to delay his sentencing due to his cancer.

Fay pleaded guilty in federal court in September to interstate transportation of money obtained by fraud. He resigned last year as pastor of St. John Roman Catholic Parish.

Prosecutors say if Fay is sentenced to prison, his reporting date can be delayed to accommodate medical treatments. Authorities also say the Bureau of Prisons can address his medical needs.

In May 2006, it was discovered that Fay had been using church money to support his lavish lifestyle, which included trips to Europe, the Caribbean and other parts of the United States. A private investigation — prompted by another church priest and its bookkeeper — also discovered that Fay was in a romantic relationship with a Philadelphia event planner, Cliff Fantini. Fay resigned shortly after the news broke.

An August 2006 independent audit commissioned by the Diocese of Bridgeport, reported that St. John Parish lost at least \$1.4 million since 2000. Fay became church pastor in 1991.

Authorities say Fay set up secret bank accounts to pay for a life of luxury, including traveling around the world and buying a condominium.

Prosecutors said Fay took between \$1 million and \$2.5 million over seven years, but the priest has disputed that. He admitted to taking between \$400,000 and \$1 million.

Fay was released on a \$50,000 bond and required to surrender his passport. His travel, the judge said, is restricted to Connecticut and Florida. He was told he cannot go to New York, New Jersey or Pennsylvania without giving notice to his probation officer. He will also be required to report to probation officers in Connecticut and Florida.

With the guilty plea, Fay waived his right to appeal — unless he is sentenced to more than 57 months.

Tom Carson of the U.S. Attorney's office said statements on behalf of Fay may be made and the victims of Fay's crimes may be permitted to speak at the sentencing hearing. Carson said the court has yet to decide if the victims in this case may be represented as a whole by the Diocese of Bridgeport, or if individual parishioners may be able to speak.

McAleer would not comment as to if or when Fay's status as a priest could change.

Fay's modest salary was not enough to fund his legal expenses. During the summer, the former pastor sent a letter to friends and former parishioners, from whom he admitted to stealing up to \$1 million, soliciting money for help to pay his lawyer's bills.